

The Monroe Institute

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by Francine Kelly

On another plane of existence, I hold hands with an etheric being of light as we fly through the star-studded darkness . . .

Suddenly, the light being is gone, and I am alone in this vast cosmic ocean. While I am not fearful of the unknown, as I often am in physical reality, I do not know what to do with myself in this place of infinite possibilities, so I just look out into the nothingness. Finally, my spirit guide retrieves me from the void I have created, and leads me to another place in time. There, clouds of red encircle us as we watch a nuclear explosion. Telepathically, we communicate our concerns for the future of the Earth.

My journey is interrupted by the kind, grandfatherly voice of Robert A. Monroe counting back from 10 to 1. I leave Focus 10, the scientific label Bob gave the "Mind Awake/Body Asleep" state, and slowly return to Consciousness 1 or C1, which is Monroe talk for "normal" physical reality. I feel my body jolt as I hear Bob repeat, "one, one, one." I am back in my body.

Out-of-body experiences (OBEs) like mine are common — but not guaranteed — at The Monroe Institute, a non-profit educational and research organization nestled in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Faber, Virginia. For 40 years, The Monroe Institute has helped hundreds of thousands of people from all over the world access expanded states of consciousness, including dimensions beyond physical reality.

My admiration for Robert Monroe began when I read "Ultimate Journey," Bob's third and last book about his own OBEs. Bob's warmth, humor, and humility emanated from the pages of the book. It was as though I could feel his presence as I read about how this successful, not-at-all spiritual, business tycoon found himself looking down at his body from the ceiling one morning in 1958. Fearful he was hallucinating because of some dangerous condition like a stroke, a brain tumor, impending mental illness or even death, Bob consulted his family physician, and later, a psychiatrist and a psychologist. They all agreed he was of sound mind and body.

Bob wanted answers, so he changed the direction of his life. He set up a research and development division in his family owned corporation, which later became The Monroe Institute.

Using his extensive background in sound technology, Bob studied its effects on human consciousness. With the

help of volunteers, Bob's research led to the development of Hemi-Sync®, a state-of-the-art auditory guidance system that synchronizes both left and right hemispheres of the brain — an optimal condition for harnessing more of the brain's potential. These sound patterns help the listener achieve various states of consciousness. Hemi-Sync also enriches a variety of disciplines, including education, medicine, psychotherapy, business training, dentistry, and a broad spectrum of complementary modalities.

During my recent visit to The Monroe Institute, my fellow Gateway Voyagers and I traveled to places most people only dream of. For an unforgettable six days, we listened to Bob Monroe's calming voice and the magical sounds of Hemi-Sync on tapes as we lay in our darkened CHEC units, an acronym for Controlled Holistic Environmental Chamber.

The CHEC unit was our private space, the alcove where we slept and listened to Hemi-Sync tapes through headphones and speakers. Tucked safely away in our CHEC units, most of us slept deeply during the night without interruption, but for shorter durations. A control panel in our new environment allowed us to create combinations of colored lights or no lights at all. Fresh air was injected constantly and softly for balanced oxygen intake. Even electromagnetic radiation was reduced by special shielding in the walls.

On the first night of our visit we were asked to give up our connection to time. Good-humoredly, we dropped our watches into a box as our trainer, Penny Holmes, a delightful child of the sixties with a reputation for being the Phyllis Diller of the New Age, passed the box from one participant to the next. Earlier in the day, I discovered Penny is Nancy Monroe's daughter. Nancy is Robert Monroe's beloved second wife and co-founder of The Monroe Institute.

I had met Laurie Monroe, Bob's daughter and President of The Monroe Institute on the telephone prior to my visit. Like Penny and other members of the Monroe family, Laurie is "real" and full of love. That's how people are at The Monroe Institute. As Penny would say, "No one is a legend in their own mind."

I was drawn to Bob Monroe and his Institute for that

reason. Bob didn't set himself up as a guru or master, although he had every opportunity to do so because of the tremendous popularity of his books and programs. Bob believed in looking within for the source and direction of our lives, and creating our own reality. Because of these beliefs, a visit to The Monroe Institute is void of any dogma. No one will ask you to follow their religious path or belief system. All Bob asks us to affirm is we are more than our physical bodies, and even that is not required. The goal here is freedom — ultimate freedom.

Unlike other consciousness raising workshops I've attended, where most of the participants are women, at The Monroe Institute, ten of the twenty people in my group were men. John Kortum, our other trainer, and often Penny's straight man, told me this is the rule rather than the exception. Obviously, men feel comfortable with Bob Monroe's high-tech view of spirituality. Whatever the reason, it warmed my heart to watch the men in our group embrace and share their experiences.

Isolated from the media, and other distractions of the "real" world, it was natural to bond with each other as we talked about our explorations. One of my greatest moments of self-discovery came while brushing my teeth in the semi-communal bathroom, while a beautiful divorcee who owned an art gallery in Indiana helped me integrate an experience I had in Focus 12, the state of expanded awareness.

Focus 12 is where perceptions are developed beyond the limitations of the five physical senses. In Focus 12, I learned not only do we create our physical reality, we create other realities as well. I understood that I am the artist and the universe is my canvas. I could use my mind to paint my own experiences. This knowledge led me into a frenzy of activity. I turned myself into a tiny fairy in a beautiful white dress, and flew in and out of various cosmic adventures, bringing love to the beings I touched.

As my ego reads this last sentence, it questions my sanity. My ego is momentarily satisfied as I look at the copy of *The Wall Street Journal* article about The Monroe Institute on my desk. Published on the front page of the September 20, 1994 edition of this relatively conservative newspaper, the headline reads: "Some Skeptics Become Believers After They Spend a Week Learning How to Get Out of Their Bodies."

Like many of my fellow Gateway Voyagers, most of my life I have felt different from other people. At The Monroe Institute, I felt like one of the crowd. People actually shared experiences in other realities and returned to the debriefing sessions to talk about them. While

visiting Focus 21, for example, one participant created the Bridge Cafe, and asked other Gateway Voyagers to join him there. A few people actually did, and compared notes about their experiences. Focus 21 is the state where we are fully awake and conscious, directing the action, as we explore more deeply our personal selves and the far reaches of other realities. Not surprisingly, it is also known as the "bridge" between physical reality and other universes.

Visiting Focus 21, or, for that matter, any of the focus levels, requires letting go of fear. When I was first invited to The Monroe Institute in 1996 to write an article, I refused the invitation. At that time, I was frightened to journey to other realities. Visits to The Monroe Institute, or its satellite workshops in other parts of the country, seem to be connected to divine timing. It appears that people go when they are ready, or when they are called.

Bob's life seemed to be like that, too. Even his departure from physical reality seemed synchronistic or divinely planned. Bob's transition may have started after his beloved wife Nancy died of breast cancer in 1992.

He wrote about his strong ties to Nancy in *Ultimate Journey*: "Two nights after her departure, I thought I had cooled down enough to attempt to visit her. Which I did. The result was an emotional explosion that included every nuance existing between two humans deeply in love, all up-front and simultaneous, without the limitations of time and physical matter. It was a great effort to return, and it took days to recover."

A week later, Bob made a second attempt to visit Nancy and experienced the same result. That was his last out-of-body experience until his own ultimate journey in 1995.

Penny and Laurie talked about Bob's memorial service as we sat on the deck of the Nancy Penn Center, looking out at the beautiful rolling hills where the service had actually taken place. Penny said there was only one cloud in the sky as two white balloons were released. Laurie told us about the joy she had felt as the balloons stayed side by side, despite the roaring March wind. "As the balloons disappeared from sight," Laurie said, "the single cloud dissipated into the clear blue sky."

On my last day at The Monroe Institute, I wrote in my journal how grateful I was for the understanding that I am more than my physical body. While I packed my suitcase, I thought about how I don't know of any other retreat center where you can get southern hospitality, travel to other dimensions, and get over your fear of dying in six short days.